

# AMERICAN RESEARCH CENTER IN EGYPT

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## Newsletter Number Nine

Dear Member:

The following is quoted from Professor Jeffery's letter of August 1st to the President:

"Perhaps this letter had better begin by assuring you that we are weathering safely this terrific heat wave of which your papers have been telling you. As a matter of fact it has not been so bad here in Cairo. Although it has not been under 95° since we arrived it has not been over 105° so far, though it has been 114° in Aswan, and 124° in Bagdad. Transjordan reports that it is the worst summer on record...

"Our two complaints are the noise and the dirt. When this street on which our windows face was Sharia Sheikh Rihan, along it moved many camels, some donkeys and a rare motor car. Those good days are gone. You seldom see a camel there now, and not so many donkeys, but two Bus routes move along it, and cars shriek along at all hours of the day and night....

"Perhaps our second report ought to be on the celebrations this month for the Anniversary of the Liberation. As we do not like crowds very much we made no attempt to go out, but nevertheless we saw quite a lot. There were celebrations from dawn to dark on the 23rd.

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beginning with dawn prayers in the open in the Ismailia Midan, now called Tahrir Square, a stone's throw from here, and ending with illuminations and fireworks at night....

"There were delegations from surrounding countries, who were given special facilities for viewing the celebrations, and on the next day the foreign colonies of the city had a Garden Party for the President and some members of his Government. The units of the Armed Forces which made up the procession acquitted themselves very well. We were in particular interested in the Camel Corps which trotted by when its turn came. They were magnificent beasts and very well trained. One of the students told us that they will allow none but Sudanese to become members of the Camel Corps....

"There can be no doubt whatever of the popularity of the new regime. Every Egyptian to whom we have spoken about it so far, has been enthusiastic about it....

"The work of the Center looks as though it is going to stretch beyond the modest limits we had thought of for it. Glasgow University in Scotland and Durham University in England have been consulting us on problems of supplying Arabic books needed for their work, and Willi Höpfner has now begun to turn over to me the problems sent him by students in Germany. This latter is rather interesting. A number of students in Germany who are working on research projects in Arabic and Islamic subjects, knowing that he is the Pastor of the German Church here in Cairo, have been sending him questions and asking for information. Some of them are relatively simple matters, but others are from advanced students and demand considerable research here....

"There are certain special matters about which to report. First there is that of the Coptic Gnostic papyri. I was specially asked



to make enquiry into the state of affairs with regard to these extremely important documents, so we made arrangements to go to Old Cairo to the Coptic Museum at a time when both the Director Pahor Labib and the Librarian Yassa 'Abd al-Masih would be there. The result was that the papyrus sheets of the Apocryphon Johannis, which are now all properly mounted under glass, were put out on a table and I was allowed to examine them at my own leisure. Some of the sheets are defective at the edges and there are some holes, but a goodly amount of the text is quite clear and easily legible. My guess is that it is fourth century, but that is only a guess, for no one but an experienced papyrologist could speak with authority on the date. The other documents were not visible. They are in that building, but they are sealed up pending the settlement of a Court case involving questions of ownership and compensation. The Judge quite properly ordered them to be sealed till the case is settled, so that no one could interfere with them, but that case has been under consideration for a long time now. Yassa 'Abd al-Masih assured me that all the twelve documents are in that package under seal, and if that is so the fears expressed that some of them had disappeared are groundless. Through Boutrous 'Abd al-Malik, who made the arrangements for us to see the Director of the Coptic Museum, we secured also last week an interview with Dr. Mustafa Amer, the Director of Antiquities, and he assured me that by September, or at least by October, the Court will have finished with the case, and the documents will be unsealed and put at the disposal of scholars in the same way as the Apocryphon Johannis now is.

"By the way, we heard that Doresse, who gave the world the early news of these Gnostic papyri, has been in Cairo again. He was down in Addis Abeba on some plan that has been proposed for filming the



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MSS in the Monastery on the island of Tana in Lake Tana - a project in which both Wallis Budge of the British Museum and Rendel Harris of the Rylands Library were interested years ago - but was on his way back to France. He may be out here again during the winter, and if so we shall try to make contact with him.

"Dr. Harald Vocke from Frankfurt am Main, who is here working on the Greek inscriptions and papyri, told me that in his quest for Greek papyri on the market he has noticed that several merchants have Coptic papyri for sale. That may be of interest to some of our friends at home. We have also heard through the grapevine that some portions of the famous Origines papyrus are still 'in the commerce'. The main part of that find is in the Egyptian Museum here and is being prepared for publication, but there are rumors that other portions have made their way to both Italy and the U.S.A.

"Another important matter to report is the coming visit of Dr. Ahmad Fakhry to Yale. He has been given one of these Fulbright passages and Yale has offered him academic hospitality, but as they cannot promise him much in the way of classes he will have ample time to visit a good many places and people at least along the east coast. When we first knew him he was Inspector of Antiquities for the Oases area, and in 1946-47, when we were here, he was out at the Junker House at the pyramids. More recently he has retired from the Department to be Professor of Egyptology at the Egyptian University....It is very important that he meet some of our good friends, so we are supplying him with a goodly number of cards of introduction.

"We had a dinner party for him here one evening to have him meet some Americans whom he will probably see again in New York, and in particular to have him meet Miss Stehle, of the Library of Congress,



who is out here studying, but who in her student days at the University of Pennsylvania specialized in the South Arabic inscriptions, and who had a great interest in the epigraphic material he had brought back from his first visit to the Yemen, and which has now been published with a commentary by G. Ryckmans. We are to go out to the Pyramids soon to see all the material he has still to publish from the three seasons of excavation he had undertaken before he accepted the University appointment. His volume on The Necropolis of al-Bagawat in Kharga Oasis, which we saw in MS form in 1946 is now published. It is perhaps a significant sign of the new day in Egypt that a Muslim publishes a work on Christian Antiquities, and puts himself on record as indignant at the fanaticism of Muslim guards who disfigure the faces of figures on Christian and other ancient monuments.

"Dr. Suryal 'Atiyya came along one morning and went with me to call on Shafiq Ghurbal, the chief man now in the Ministry of Public Instruction, with whom it is important for the Center to keep in touch. Unfortunately he is nearing his retirement, and no one knows who the new man will be. In a way he is glad he is retiring for it will give him the leisure to complete some of the historical work on which he has been long engaged. On the other hand it has been interesting and very important work in the Ministry which he is sorry to leave....

"The 'Atiyyas are at present down in Alexandria with the children. When they come back we are to go out to their home and see the masses of notes taken during the expedition to Mt. Sinai. In the U.S.A. attention has naturally been given for the most part to the photographing of the Greek MSS in the Monastery there. We learn that there are still a great many Greek papyri there which remain to be photographed, and Dr. 'Atiyya is particularly interested in the Arabic



material that was found. Some of this he says is unique and of the first importance to scholarship. He hopes that the Center may be able to open up some way for its proper study and publication....

"Dr. 'Abd al-Latif Ibrahim of the Teachers' Institute was in to tea one afternoon, and from him we learned a great deal about the plans for reforming the whole system of education in the country. Kabbani, the new Minister of Education, seems to be an extraordinarily active person, with broad views, and there is every prospect of great advance under his leadership. We met him at the Farewell Dinner given to Dr. Badeau, at which he made a very good speech. Through 'Abd al-Latif we may have the opportunity this winter to make contact with several types of School here in the city and environs and study things at first hand.

"We have already had cordial invitations to visit the Fayyum and Assiut during the winter. To Assiut we have been many times in past years, but neither of us has ever been to the Fayyum, so that will be a new experience. We have also had a feeler as to whether we might make a trip to 'Amman to see some of the material from the most recent finds brought in from the Dead Sea Caves. That is a little outside Egypt, but it has connections with studies going on here, so it may be legitimate to consider making the trip.

"The Librarian of Brandeis University has written about his problem. He said that he had had correspondence with Dr. Cooney about it, but it was necessary to start in de novo. As part of the Farmington Plan Brandeis University Library has to keep abreast of contemporary Near Eastern publications, and the Library is finding it difficult to discover what is being published and how to get it. That is no new problem. In the twenties Snouch Hurgronje of Leiden wrote to me to say



that their Library was prepared to purchase any new works appearing in Arabic if only they could find out what was appearing, but publishers just would not send catalogues or notices of new books. We tried then to set up a system but failed. It may prove more successful now. My wife and I went to see the young man at 'Au Papyrus' to whom Brandeis Library had written. He proved to bright and cooperative. I think he understands the situation and will do his best to keep them informed of what is appearing, and will purchase for them what they desire. We shall look in on him occasionally to see how things are progressing."

The following is quoted from Professor Jeffery's letter of September 1st to the President:

"August is on the whole a dull month in this city for everyone who possibly can leaves here for cooler climes....

"The unpleasantnesses here have been two. First has been the humidity, due, of course, to the rising Nile. We attended the ceremony which nowadays takes the place of the old sacrifice of the virgin as Bride of the Nile, and there was the usual rejoicing and the usual fireworks at the official notification that the Nile was now properly in flood, but the flood has gone beyond expectations....

"This has been the month of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. That event has received much more attention in the local press than it usually does because the President of the new Republic, General Naguib, went to the Hijaz to be present for the last three days of the Pilgrimage ceremonies. There were numerous pictures in the papers, showing him in his ihram or pilgrim dress, taking part in the prayers, in the circumambulation of the Ka'ba, drinking at the well Zemzem, kissing the edge of the Sacred Carpet, as well as pictures of his visits to Ibn Sa'ud and other Hijazi officials and dignitaries. He made a broadcast



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from Mecca...

"In my early days in the Near East pilgrims pilgrimaged to the Holy City. The caravans would leave for the Red Sea port where the pilgrims shipped across to Jiddah and then joined the caravan again from Mecca. In those days it was only a very few favoured persons who could go by car either from here to the port or from Jiddah to Mecca, and the great majority went on foot. This year numbers went from here by airplane, and we saw notices of pilgrims from Turkey, from Syria and from India coming by plane. Since planes go so quickly and have little convenience for clothes changing, the pilgrims have to put on their two-piece pilgrim garb before they embark on the plane, whereas those who go by road can wait to change till they come to the proper mawqif on their route which marks the point of entry into the sacred territory...

"We saw three different notices of Russian Muslims coming this year as pilgrims. Some years ago the Arabic press carried bitter attacks on the Soviet authorities for preventing their Central Asian Muslim subjects from fulfilling the duty of pilgrimage. Whether this marks a change of heart in the authorities, or whether these were just pilgrims who managed to get away inconspicuously, one could not gather....

"Early in the month we had a visit from Karl Kup of the New York Public Library. He was delighted with the results of his trip in India, and will doubtless report to you later of what success he had in this country. We were much amused by his contacts with a gentleman in Alexandria who wanted to sell him some Armenian manuscripts which he had bought as a speculation. I am particularly certain that they are the same manuscripts that were brought to me here some years ago by the Armenian refugee who had brought them out of old Armenia and was anxious to raise money on them so that he could set up in business. They were



beautiful but scientifically of no particular value. Mr. Kup had his picture in the papers and his visit seems to have stirred up some interest in our project for better information service on what is being published by the Arabic presses of this country and its neighbouring Arab lands. We discussed with him the question of the Cresswell Bibliography, and that can be taken up afresh when Cresswell returns after his summer leave.

"Dr. Ahmad Fakhry has left for the U.S.A. He will be at Yale as his headquarters, but as they have no definite lecture programme for him he will be free to visit around a good deal, and we do hope that some of you folk interested in the Center will be able to meet him and hear him....

"Early in the month Worth Howard brought in to see me the Advisor to Foreign Students at Columbia, who is over here making a survey of Educational Institutions with an eye on a better system of clearances for foreign students who come to American Universities. We knew his predecessor at Columbia quite well, but it was curious that he had to come to Cairo to meet me. His visit brought up a real problem, and one in which the Center in future may well assist. Last Saturday two Palestinian students were in to see me. Both of them want to come to the U.S.A. for further study, but they wanted to talk to someone who was actually in academic life and could tell them things they could not get from the more or less official information given out by the Consulates....

"I have discovered that some of the Nubians around here speak neither the Kunuzi nor the Fiadaja dialect, but speak a Dongalawi dialect, so if there is leisure during the winter it may be possible to collect some material on that dialect from them.

"Now that September is here everyone is coming back to town,



and the Fulbright and other people have already begun to arrive from the U.S.A.; so the September letter may have more of interest for you, and we ourselves hope to be more active."

Yours sincerely,

EDWARD W. FORBES

Edward W. Forbes  
President